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CHARLES BURROUGHS, D.D.

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MEMOIR

OF

CHARLES BURROUGHS, D.D.,

PREPARED FOR

The New Hampshire Historical Society,

BY

ANDREW P. PEABODY.

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MEMOIR

OF

CHARLES BURROUGHS, D.D.

CHARLES BURROUGHS, the fourth child and son of George and Mary (Fullerton) Burroughs, was born in Boston, on the 27th of December, 1787. His early boyhood was passed chiefly in Boston; in part, however, at Billerica, under the tuition of the then eminent teacher Dr. Pemberton, of whom he always spoke with reverence and affection. He received important aid and encouragement in his literary culture from his pastor, Rev. Dr. Gardiner, Rector of Trinity Church, who had been educated in England, and had there been trained to a

more critical scholarship than had become naturalized in our own institutions of learning. The influence of a man of so high and varied accomplishments found a genial reception with his young parishioner, who, through his whole life, was accustomed to ascribe his love of letters and his conversance with the classics to this early intimacy. In 1802 young Burroughs entered Harvard College. Among his surviving classmates are the venerable and eminent Dr. Jacob Bigelow and Dr. Cogswell, the latter well known for his services in establishing the Astor Library, — the worthy consummation of a life consecrated with the utmost singleness of purpose to the advancement of knowledge; and of the deceased members of the class, among other honored names, we may specify those of Alexander H. Everett, Daniel Oliver, the distinguished medical professor and lecturer, and William Pitt Preble,

who held high offices both judicial and diplomatic. Burroughs is represented by his coevals in college as having had great personal beauty, winning manners, and the most amiable disposition. He maintained a character free not only from gross stain, but from the charge even of juvenile indiscretion. He was not regarded as a hard student, but was known to employ a large portion of his time in reading, and to have become, during his college life, well grounded in elegant literature both ancient and modern. At the same time it is manifest that he could not have neglected his college work; for, having delivered on taking his first degree a poem (which by the usage of the times indicated not rank, but mere verse-making capacity), on receiving his Master's degree he delivered the Latin Valedictory, which was wont to be assigned only to one who had been a very high scholar in college.

After leaving college, Mr. Burroughs pursued the study of theology with Dr. Gardiner, who, in addition to his literary attainments, had no little reputation as a reader and a pulpit orator. Dr. Gardiner's reading is said to have been pre-eminently graphic, so that, if the lesson of the day were narrative or descriptive, his hearers almost fancied that they saw what they heard. Accustomed from infancy to this style of reading, Mr. Burroughs insensibly grew into it; and it was but one of the many prestiges of success with which he entered on his profession.

On Christmas Eve, 1806, St. John's (Episcopal) Church in Portsmouth was destroyed by fire. The parish worshipping in it — whose history, through some periods of suspended animation, may be traced back to the early part of the seventeenth century — had become enfeebled under a rector who had failed to secure the entire respect and

confidence of his congregation, and who had resigned his charge at the preceding Easter. New Hampshire was not then within the limits of any diocese, and the Episcopalians of that day were much less rigid than those of our own time in adherence to rubric and canon. After the burning of the church, the congregation, destitute of both shepherd and fold, united with one of the Congregational churches of the town then without a pastor; having the use of their house of worship on Sunday afternoons, and generally employing their preacher for the morning to read the evening service and accompany it with a sermon. Meanwhile the citizens of the town contributed with great promptness and munificence toward the erection of a new church, which was completed in 1808, and at the opening of which for public worship — not technically the *consecration*, which did not take place till nearly half a

century afterward — the devotional services were conducted by the young pastor of the hospitable Congregationalists. But with the new edifice it was fitting to introduce an era of canonical conformity. There were, however, very few men in holy orders, who had not parochial charges of their own. Mr. Burroughs, a candidate for orders, was therefore sent to Portsmouth *ad interim*, as a reader. It was understood that, while he had not authority to perform certain clerical functions, and was not termed a preacher, it was lawful for him to read sermons of his own composition. Both as a reader and as a writer, he gave entire satisfaction to the members of the parish, and drew to the new church not a few from other congregations, who were willing to remain if they might enjoy his ministrations. At the same time, his social qualities commended him equally to persons of taste and refinement and to

those of plain and simple habits. A gentleman by gift of nature no less than by opportunity and culture, and at the same time full of kindness and mainly solicitous to do good, feeling neither beneath the highest nor above the humblest, he won the sincere regard and cordial esteem of all with whom he was brought into relation; and the consequence of his transient ministry was an invitation to become Rector of St. John's Church. He accepted the invitation; but continued his services as a mere reader for more than a year. There was then no bishop of Massachusetts, and the Eastern Diocese had not yet been formed. It was probably this state of things which led to the delay of Mr. Burroughs's ordination. He received deacon's orders at Philadelphia, at the hands of the venerable Bishop White, on the 10th of December, 1809. At this time he spent several weeks in Philadelphia; and, as we

have learned from his classmate Dr. Bigelow, then a medical student in that city, was warmly welcomed in society, and much admired as a preacher. On May 20, 1812, he was ordained priest, at Portsmouth, by Bishop Griswold, who had been but recently consecrated as first bishop of the Eastern Diocese; and on the next day he was in due form instituted by that prelate in the rectorship which he had virtually held for three or four years.

At the time of Mr. Burroughs's settlement, Portsmouth was the residence of a large number of distinguished men, many of whom were his parishioners, and others his friends. He was at one time a fellow-boarder with Daniel Webster, and formed then an intimacy with him which lasted through Mr. Webster's life. The late Jeremiah Mason attended his church, — a keenly critical, yet kindly listener. Among the younger men

of culture there was a marked development of literary taste and ability, and Mr. Burroughs was one of the foremost in the study of the classics and other kindred pursuits, always ready to assume the post of service and of labor, and to prepare smooth paths for feet less experienced than his own.

During Dr. Burroughs's pastorate the external events were few. On April 8, 1823, he was married to Ann Rindge Peirce (daughter of John Peirce, an eminent merchant of Portsmouth), whose devoted love made his home happy, gave its holy ministries to his days of decline and infirmity, and guards his memory as the most sacred and precious of trusts. About ten years afterward he purchased the magnificent mansion-house erected by Governor Langdon in 1784, and occupied by him till his death. Here Dr. Burroughs was able to exercise the ample and elegant hospitality in which he

rejoiced, and to surround himself with objects of taste, works of art, and the books he best loved. The very large drawing-room became at once his library and his reception-room, and one could seldom call upon him without finding on his library-table some object of fresh interest, — book, engraving, flower, antiquity, or novelty. For many years he enjoyed uninterrupted health; yet at a comparatively early period his voice became somewhat impaired in compass and power, indicating a tendency to bronchitis, of which he had two or three severe attacks in the latter years of his ministry. In consequence of the interruption to his public services occasioned by these repeated illnesses, and of a growing liableness to exhausting fatigue when in full duty, he, without any formal arrangement with his parish, employed in succession several stated assistants. At length, in 1857, he resigned his

pastorate, and declined to reconsider his action, though invited so to do by the unanimous vote of the church.

A life barren of incidents, and with but few marked dates, is often for this only the more abundant in its beneficent activity and the richer in its enduring fruits. Thus was it with the long and peaceful pastorate whose history we have told in so few words. We will now, from our intimate knowledge of him for thirty-five years, endeavor to convey our impressions of his character and his services as a man, a minister, and a citizen.

He had by inheritance a nature finely toned. His sensibilities were delicate and keen; his tastes pure; his standard of honor high; his sense of right prompt, discriminating, and exacting. We cannot conceive of his ever having uttered a word or committed an act inconsistent with that most noble style of manhood, the Christian gentleman.

Courtesy, urbanity, and kindness in all the intercourse of life were less with him a habit than a necessity. His recoil from all that was coarse and rude was more like the instinctive shrinking of the sensitive plant than the conscious repellency of one who has had tendencies of that sort to resist, or corresponding habits to reform, in his own person. His gentle dignity and unstudied grace of speech and manners warded off the rough contacts which most men encounter, won for him an easy way among all sorts and conditions of people, brought out what was best in them in their intercourse with him, and thus often made his opinions of men better than they deserved; for there were those whom he thought he knew intimately who never revealed to him aspects of their character well known to all beside. But his moral indignation, when aroused, was intensely strong; and while he was the enemy

of none, his disesteem, when he once saw reason for it, was emphatic, profound, and irrevocable.

His conversational gifts were of a very high order. His power of description, racy anecdote, and entertaining narrative gave a rich zest to his liberal hospitality, and made him a welcome guest in every circle. On higher themes he often rose into a spontaneous eloquence, which was never surpassed in his best written discourses, and seldom in those impromptu addresses on occasions of public interest or sacred moment, when his friends depended on him for the most stirring and efficient utterances that ever fell from his lips. His fluency of address, with his warm sympathy, rendered him pre-eminently a "son of consolation" among the afflicted, whose burdens and sorrows he made his own, and to whom he ministered with an assiduity that taxed even the strength

of his most vigorous days, and that was still unremitted when growing years and infirmities might well have sought relief from duties so onerous.

He was through life a diligent student and a zealous reader. He was well versed in the classics, and familiar especially with the best Latin writers; and few men have been more conversant with early English literature, in prose and poetry, sacred and secular. He was a good Hebrew scholar, and indefatigable in the study of Biblical criticism, as also in the history, standard authorities, and expository and apologetic literature of his own Church. He was, however, somewhat distrustful of new views in whatever appertained to theology or Biblical science, and reluctant to admit aught not consecrated by venerable antiquity. He had formed his opinions on essential subjects deliberately, with diligent research, and with the aid of

the best authorities of his time, and not unnaturally he was unwilling to disturb convictions which in him were identified with his best thought and his highest life. He knew well that many of the guests that might have claimed his mental hospitality were any thing but angels, and he was not disposed to open the door to the rabble of novel speculations in the doubtful chance of receiving "angels unawares."

In his chosen profession he was evidently inspired, energized, and guided by the sincerest piety. A sacred sense of divine verities, a conscious nearness to the eternal Father, a reverential and tender love for the Saviour, a felt dependence on heavenly strength and grace, a consecration of his whole being to the work given him to do, and a vivid and realizing view of the unseen world, were with him the fountain of life and of joy. Never ostentatious in religious

profession or utterance, abhorring sanctimony and cant, deeming the obtruding of sacred themes on irrelevant occasions but the casting of pearls before swine, he yet had always the air and manner that indicated high communings and chastened views of all things earthly; and he suffered no fit occasion to pass without the fervent utterance of his convictions and feelings as a Christian. At the same time he did honor to his faith by a sanctity of life beyond reproach or cavil, by untiring vigilance in his sacred calling, and by a charity and philanthropy which were always open to every rightful claim.

In his work as a preacher of the Gospel, his diligence would compare well with that of the "painful" preachers of earlier fame. Few men have written so many sermons, and with so faithful labor. His sermons were pre-eminently evangelical, — on the great themes of repentance, faith, and Chris-

tian righteousness, — earnest in appeal, faithful in rebuke. He preached not the Church, but its Head. A careful observer of the ecclesiastical holy days, he made them occasions not for the glorification of the Church, but for the exhibition of the Redeemer's love, cross, power, and glory. His style was conformed, not by imitation, but by long familiarity, to the best earlier English models, — copious, fervent, rhythmical, less concise, indeed, than if he had taken the Latin classics for his standard, but in its redundancy always the outflow of a full mind and heart. His sermons were methodical in their structure and arrangement, their divisions exhausting, and the transitions distinctly marked. If they had any fault, it was that of excessive fulness. He seemed unwilling to omit any portion of a large subject, or any of the accessory thoughts or illustrations that crowded his own mind during the season of

composition; and his fertility on his favorite themes seemed exhaustless. Thus he never repeated a Christmas sermon. We heard in succession more than twenty of those sermons, always appropriate, yet always on a new aspect of the great miracle of that day. His delivery was earnest, rapid, strongly emotional, in the earlier years of his ministry impressively eloquent, and after the partial failure of his voice still effective, and never losing its charm to accustomed ears. But the discourses that are most fondly remembered are those of his lecture-room and chapel, — extemporaneous in form, yet always the result of the most faithful study. He completed on these occasions what few have done, — the exposition of the entire Scriptures, Hebrew and Christian. He went over the whole ground in careful preparation, with the record in the original before him, and surrounded by the

commentators whom he trusted and loved, — not always those whom younger divines would have chosen, but those who had been revered as oracles in his earlier days, and from whose works have been drawn, often without the ceremony of quotation, many of the best materials to which later expositors owe their fame. On these occasions, freed from the incumbrance of notes, his naturally rich and fluent oratory found full scope. In the glow of his own devout feeling he found in the Divine Word nothing barren or unfruitful. His adoring thought outstripped, while it inspired, his rapt utterance; and those who best loved his written sermons felt that they were listening, at these informal services, to a far higher order of thought and diction, — that the preacher had grown into the prophet, the didactic outbloomed into the lyric.

Dr. Burroughs's fidelity as a preacher did

not make him forgetful of his pastoral duty. At home in all the homes of his flock, he was especially so in those of the afflicted, the aged, and the poor. Wherever there was specific need of his services, they were rendered with such tenderness and perseverance, with such an affluence of cheering words and offices of saintly love, that to many hearts his presence and his name were identified with all that is most sacred in earth and heaven. Possessed of ample ability, he was bountiful, yet judicious, in his charity to the poor; especially to those who had seen better days, and were reluctant to bear any external badge of pauperism. It is not easy to overestimate the number of women and families of this class who were enabled to maintain their self-respect unimpaired, and to subsist in apparent comfort on very scanty property of their own, through resources furnished directly by him, or made

availing by his agency. He found for them the means of helping themselves, and when those means fell short he supplied the deficiency.

Dr. Burroughs's ecclesiastical position and relations claim our distinct notice. His was the oldest and long the only Episcopal church in New Hampshire, and during the greater part of his ministry the only one capable of exerting an influence beyond its own borders; and this church, as we have intimated, though essentially strong, was greatly enfeebled at the time of his settlement, but was nourished, largely through his efforts and sacrifices, into more than its previous vigor and prosperity. Whenever there was any extraordinary demand for repairs or improvements, he was foremost among the contributors; and in all church charities he took the lead. For many years he was the representative man of the Epis-

copal Church in New Hampshire, and his services were freely given wherever it seemed expedient to gather new congregations. He was prominent as an officer of the State Convention, and for nearly the whole of his ministry was always elected as a delegate to the Triennial General Convention, in whose proceedings he uniformly bore an active and influential part. He believed in his own Church, and loved it. He had been trained in the conviction, confirmed by his careful study, that its ministry was founded on apostolic tradition, and in accordance with the practice of the Primitive Church. He delighted in its services, was unwilling ever to omit or curtail them, and rejoiced in every opportunity for their use.

But, while a devoted churchman, — a high churchman he would have called himself by the standard of his earlier days, — he maintained the most genial and generous relations

of friendship and intercourse with clergymen and churches of other denominations. He adhered to the canons of his Church even in their exclusiveness; but to those which limited his Christian fellowship he gave the most literal construction which they would bear, while he obeyed all the rest in spirit as in letter. They forbade his inviting other than Episcopal ministers to officiate in his own church on stated occasions of public worship, and he submitted to the restriction; but, on all occasions and in all places not included in this rule, he deemed it a privilege to unite in religious services with other ministers of the Gospel. He freely accepted invitations to officiate for them and with them in their churches, and after his resignation of his own charge he was always ready to fill their places in case of sickness or necessary absence, scrupulously asking — as he was canonically bound to do — in every

instance the leave of his young successor, and not a little indignant when that leave was accompanied with an expression of disapproval. On other than the regular occasions of religious service he was a frequent attendant at the churches of his clerical brethren, and they and their congregations always felt that they had the most cordial welcome in his church. He deemed the Lord's Supper a common feast of love for all Christians, and cordially invited to it all the disciples of Christ without reference to their ecclesiastical relations. At his Christmas service and communion it was not uncommon to see almost all the clergymen of the city, and nearly as many communicants from other congregations as from his own. In his kindnesses and charities he was equally broad. When he knew of a case of poverty, he considered it as within his charge, whatever the sufferer's church or creed; and for

counsel, and for friendly offices of all descriptions, he was freely resorted to by persons of every variety of faith and ritual.

With this spirit he was, of course, more than the minister of a parish: he was a foremost — in many regards and for a long period *the* foremost — citizen of Portsmouth. For many years he was Chairman of the School Committee, and was always an efficient helper in movements for the advancement of educational interests. He was influential in the establishment, active in the administration, and for several successive years the President (we believe the first President), of the Howard Benevolent Society, — a pioneer institution, which, so far as we know, initiated the plan now generally adopted of dividing a town or city, for the relief or prevention of pauperism, into districts, each under the charge of its own committee, and furnishing the specific sup-

plies found to be needed on personal visitation. He was the second President of the Portsmouth Athenæum, and during his long administration contributed far more than any, we might almost say than all, other persons to its growth from small beginnings into an institution that is equally an ornament to the city and an essential means of high literary culture to the community. In fine, he was always relied upon, and never in vain, for his voice or pen, his liberal contributions or active services, in every plan for the public improvement; and it would be difficult to recall any movement or institution of that kind, in the city of his residence, with which his name is not more or less associated.

In various State institutions he also held a prominent place. The members of the New Hampshire Historical Society need not be informed of his long official relation to their

body, of his efficient charge of its interests, and of his unique and inestimable essay, printed in its Transactions, on the necessity and the methods of securing the preservation of public documents. He was early interested in the needs and sufferings of the insane, and was long the President of the Trustees of the New Hampshire Insane Asylum, making his office no sinecure, but maintaining frequent intercourse with the officers in charge of the institution, often visiting the inmates and ascertaining their condition by personal inspection, and regarding the trust as second to none in its sacredness, and in its demands on his best thought and most faithful industry. He was for thirty-two years one of the Trustees of Phillips Exeter Academy, and for nearly all that time President of the Board; and in this capacity he contributed greatly to the prudent management of the funds of the institu-

tion, the enlargement of the privileges it offers, and the enhancement of its reputation as second to no similar seminary of learning in the country.

It may well be supposed that so various employments and trusts, together with the engrossing demands of his profession, gave Dr. Burroughs little room for activity beyond his own State; and his most busy years were during the period when Portsmouth was a weary day's journey from Boston, and was itself the centre of a large circumference, instead of being through the agency of steam almost a suburb of the metropolis of New England. Except in the general administration of his own Church, and among a cherished circle of friends in his native city, he was much less known than a man of so large a local reputation and influence would be at the present day. His merits were, however, by no means unrecognized beyond his im-

mediate sphere. He was early chosen an honorary member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and read in Boston, at the invitation of that Society, three lectures on the life of Sir William Pepperell, which have hardly ever been surpassed in fidelity and minuteness of historical research. In 1833 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Columbia College, an institution with which he had no personal relations, and which can have been led thus to honor him only by his general reputation as a scholar and a theologian.

Dr. Burroughs performed in the latter years of his life a service which will insure for him an enduring name among our public benefactors. Deeply impressed with the poverty of our best libraries in religious literature, and with the scanty means of theological research in private collections, he conceived the idea of establishing a library

devoted to that department alone. His plan had the broadest possible scope, comprehending not only editions of the Scriptures, Biblical works, and standard theological writings, but books by and concerning all Christian and pseudo-Christian sects, works relating to the ethnic religions ancient and modern, and even the entire literature of scepticism and infidelity, which the Christian scholar has no right to ignore. The result of this plan was the General Theological Library in Boston, already comprising several thousands of volumes, rapidly increasing, and opened on such liberal terms that none who need its benefits can be debarred from its use. This institution, whose existence is due solely to his efforts, whose affairs were wisely and prosperously initiated and conducted under his presidency, and which he generously endowed with books and money during his lifetime, was also lib-

erally remembered in the testamentary disposition of his property.

We regret that we have not been able to obtain a list of Dr. Burroughs's publications. We believe that he issued from the press but one printed volume entirely his own. This is entitled "The Poetry of Religion, and Other Poems," and bears the date of 1851. It is a series of poems rich in devout sentiment, and indicating an easy command of poetic imagery and rhythmical diction. He, however, though he often wrote in verse for his own solace and recreation, or on occasions of interest to his friends, was by no means vain of his poetic gifts; and this little volume was not offered to the public, but printed only for private circulation. His published sermons and addresses were numerous, always appropriate, written with great care, and not unfrequently the result of very extensive and elaborate research.

On the completion of a new almshouse in Portsmouth, he was invited to deliver a discourse at the dedication of the chapel; and we doubt whether so much of the history of pauperism is anywhere to be found within the same space, as in this discourse as printed. Similarly rich as historical documents were several occasional sermons — some of them printed — on epochs of peculiar interest to his own parish, especially one delivered at the consecration of the church edifice, — a ceremony performed according to the prescribed ritual, after extensive repairs, in 1848, forty years after its non-episcopal dedication. He published also an admirable sermon, delivered in St. Paul's Church, New York, at an anniversary of the Sunday School Union of the Protestant Episcopal Church. He preached at the funeral of his friend Rev. Dr. Morss, of Newburyport; and the sermon, containing

a vivid portraiture and fervent eulogy of an excellent man, was published. He delivered and published, also, an oration on the centennial anniversary of Washington's birthday, which is a discriminating sketch of the character and services of the Father of his Country. One of Dr. Burroughs's earlier literary labors was occasioned by a sad event that occurred in the Portsmouth harbor in 1825. Two young men, teachers, were drowned on a pleasure excursion. One of them, Morse, left numerous papers, which indicated equally high literary promise and profound devotional feeling. These papers Dr. Burroughs prepared for the press in a small duodecimo volume, with an appreciative memoir of the writer and his friend. We regret that we are unable to give a fuller catalogue of publications which appeared at intervals through many years, but of which we cannot learn that any collec-

tion was ever made. In addition to these separate publications, Dr. Burroughs was a frequent and valued contributor to the "Portsmouth Journal," and other periodicals of the day.

After Dr. Burroughs's resignation of his parochial charge, he virtually retained it for a large number of his flock, who still looked to him as their pastor in all important emergencies; and at the same time he busied himself in those modes of general usefulness which he who wishes to do good always finds open to him. On Sundays he commonly preached either at the Navy Yard, or at some church in Portsmouth or its vicinity. Always an ardent patriot, on the breaking out of the Rebellion he entered warmly into the national cause, spoke in its behalf with great vigor and eloquence at several public meetings, and contributed largely in both money and influence to the various move-

ments in providing for the public defence, and in meeting the needs of the army, and the claims of humanity in behalf of the wounded and suffering.

For several winters Dr. and Mrs. Burroughs exchanged their home for lodgings in Boston, where he enjoyed the society of many friends as well new as old. The winter of 1866–67 was thus spent; and though those who saw him frequently witnessed no failure of mental activity, nor even a diminished fluency or sprightliness in conversation, still his look and manner betokened declining strength, and he found himself unequal to some of his wonted pursuits and recreations. He returned to Portsmouth in the early spring. During the summer he was feeble and easily wearied, yet with no symptoms other than those of senile infirmity. In the autumn bronchial disease was fully developed, and, though relieved at times

by palliatives, it was soon perceived to be incurable. As winter approached, it became certain that a fatal change could not be long delayed. He had at times very severe suffering, and was seldom free from labored respiration and a racking cough. His mind remained clear and firm, his patience was uninterrupted, and his cheerfulness unimpaired. Able to converse only at rare intervals and with difficulty, he yet sustained the spirits of those around him, instead of needing their support. He knew how rapidly he was approaching the close of life; but he had long before overcome the fear of death, and his only utterances with regard to it were those of assured faith, hope clear as sight, and solemn joy. A short time before his decease he enjoyed the comfort of a visit from Bishop Eastburn of Massachusetts (to whose diocese he had transferred his ecclesiastical relations), who administered to him

the Holy Communion, — a season so serenely happy that those who partook with him of the feast of love felt that he in spirit was already on the other side of the death-river. After this he waited a few days, with ebbing strength, yet without severe paroxysms of disease, and passed into immortality on the 5th of March, 1868. The funeral services were held at Trinity Church, Boston, and were conducted by Bishop Eastburn, who delivered an appropriate address on the occasion. A large number of friends who loved and honored him then followed the body to its final rest at Mount Auburn.

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